

GENEALOGY GENIUS *by Penn Woods*

Yes, I'll be the first to admit it. We have a genius in the family. I know it's true because my brother, himself, told me so. Several times.

Our brother (older than the younger brother) earns his claim to fame by living in faded, dusty pages where he thrives among strange punctuation marks and rigid reporting rules. All of this demands steady nerves and several pairs of glasses.

Genealogy is a tricky business that involves painstaking historical research, strict, accurate recording, and annual meetings with other genealogy experts. He steadfastly traces our family tree, its extending branches and deep, gritty roots, and keeps the family informed of our unique, oblique ancestors.

We're excited to learn of the generations of impressive and educated people he's discovered in our family line, and what great pillars of society make up our star-studded past. It will soon be clear from where we, who are living today, received our myriad talents, good looks, and enviable physiques.

Every few years, our Genealogy Genius announces new material on his family website and mails out large volumes of our historical (and hysterical) family history.

Along with these treasures infiltrates occasional family trash. "Into every genealogy, a little rain must fall," our brother warns us. We gasp to read that our mother's brother was found in the gutter dead from drink or that great granddad lost multitudes of brain cells in later years.

So we brace ourselves for each upcoming volume of family lore. We hold our collective breath and hope that his latest dig won't reveal anything worse than last time. When the new volume appears, it reads more dramatically than a soap opera, more traumatically than an emergency room, and more radically than we dreamed.

What we assumed was the Perfect Family has made a distinct detour: Alcoholic grandpas, crazy grandmas, stuttering uncles, runaway aunts, and fat-nose cousins flood the pages of our family history.

In despair, the family meets at a reunion over the summer. We discuss the genealogy research, its progress, its past repercussions, and its future possibilities. "We want you to find the kings in our family tree," we plead. "No more outlaws, saloon shooters, or babies born with six toes on each foot."

Our brother looks shocked. "That's the way it goes," he explains. "There are

black sheep in every family."

"Agreed," we say, "but you've turned up a whole flock of black sheep. You can do better than that. We can't take any more! Give us some people we can brag about. We want kings and presidents, queens and whiz kids. At least make it *look* like we're a Perfect Family."

Our genius sibling looks bewildered. He winces, crinkles his brow and wipes away sweat drops.

"I don't know, . . . " he hesitates.

We pat him on the back, ruffle his hair, tweak his fat nose and depart the reunion with high hopes in anticipation of his next genealogy volume. We know he can improve. After all, he's our self-proclaimed family genius.

No pressure.

The author lives in Los Alamitos, CA and claims that her brother is a member of Albuquerque Genealogical Society.